

The MAID of the FOREST

A Romance of St. Clair's Defeat

By RANDALL PARRISH

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CHAPTER II.

With General Harmar. "That will do, sergeant," I called out, the moment I could gain breath. "Here now, don't hit that man! Surround this fellow and take him inside the stockade. Never mind me; I'll take care of myself."

The little squad tramped off, Girty in their midst, his head turned back over his shoulder watchfully. I stepped forward fronting Brady, and held out my hand.

"Sorry this happened," I said soberly, "but I promised to bring the man to the fort, and I had to defend him."

"He's a bloody savage!" he retorted, with an oath, and making no responsive movement; "he's worse than any Injun on the border."

"I know all that, Brady. I despise the fellow as much as any of you, although I may not have suffered through his acts as some of you have. But he is here in peace, not war. To injure him now might cost hundreds of lives. Let him give his message to General Harmar; after that we shall know how to deal with the skunk. At least do not hold this against me; I only did my duty."

Brady loosened his grip on his gun, and took my hand.

"I understand that, boy," he said, not unkindly. "Your fighting was square enough, and no harm done. I like the way you went at it, but I reckon you don't quite sense how we old Kentuckians feel about renegades."



"Let Go of the Gun Barrel, You Young Fool!"

"That stripe, 'Taint natural you should, for there ain't been no Injun war to amount to anything since you come to this country. But I've seen that greasy devil in paint an' feathers; so has Evans here, an' these yer young fellows know some of the dirt he's done. He's led war parties against us, an' killed our neighbors. That skunk stood by an' let 'em burn ol' man Roddy at the stake, an' never raised a hand. It's a hellish fact, true, sir! An' he only laughed at Kenton when the redskins made him run the gauntlet. The ugly cur ought to be skinned alive!"

"I've heard all that," I replied when he stopped, his eyes blazing angrily. "But two wrongs never made a right, men. He came here voluntarily as a messenger. The tribes are in council at Sandusky and sent him. That is why I stood in his defense against you. We must learn what word he brings. If he were killed on such a mission every Indian in the northwest would feel called upon to avenge his death. It would mean raids and warfare the whole length of the Ohio; it would mean the murder of women and children; the burning of homes, and all the horrors of Indian warfare for years to come. There is only a fringe of white settlers on this side of the river, Brady, and a mere handful of soldiers to defend them. We cannot afford to have war, we are not ready."

"Ready? rot! I am for going in now, an' finishing the job. This new government policy of strokin' those devils on the back, makes me sick. That ain't the way we cleaned up Kentucky."

"Easier said than done, Brady. This isn't Kentucky, and the conditions are different. Those were hunters and backwoodsmen who took possession of that land to the south. They came alone, on foot, rifle in hand, fighting men every one. That was their trade. These settlers who have come in north of the Ohio are of a different breed; they have brought wives and children with them, and have come to till the land. They are not hunters and woodsmen; half of them never even saw an Indian. They would be as helpless as babes on a war trail."

St. Clair and Harmar are doing the best they can under such conditions. They have got to compromise; they don't dare provoke war. The Indians and the British know this is true; Girty knows it, or he never would have ventured to come in here—what is it, Faulkner?"

The sergeant, a short, stocky fellow saluted stiffly.

"The compliments of General Harmar, sir, and would you come to his office."

"Very well, sergeant, as soon as I can slip out of these hunting clothes. Am I right, Brady?"

"Maybe so," he admitted reluctantly, "but that ain't my style o' handling Injuns. I reckon we'll hang 'round boys, till we see what's comin' out o' this yer message bearin'." I'd sure like to be in any fracas whar I could get a slam at that bound o' hell."

It required but a few moments for me to shift my hunting suit for a suitable uniform, and this accomplished, I hurried across the parade to the office. The orderly admitted me at once. General Harmar was alone, sitting beside a small writing table, and began questioning me the instant I appeared.

"Close the door, Mr. Hayward. Now, sir, what is it that just happened outside the gate? Fighting with some of my scouts, I understand, over a fellow you brought in with you? I presume there was some cause for this unseemly quarrel?"

"There was, General Harmar," I replied, standing at attention. "He leaned back in his chair, drumming with one hand on the table, his stern eyes on my face."

"Then make your report, sir." I went over the events of the past few hours rapidly, but clearly, and there was no interruption until I ceased to speak.

"Who did you say the man was?" "Simon Girty, sir. That was the name he gave me, and Brady recognized him at once."

"What is his mission? Did he say?" "Not a word, sir, except that he represented the tribes, and bore a message from Hamilton."

"Think you he lied? Is his purpose to learn our strength and position?" "No, sir, I think not," I replied soberly. "There was no necessity; beyond doubt they know that already. I do not think the fellow would dare come other than he said: he is not of that breed."

He walked back and forth across the room, his hands clasped, his head bent in thought. He was a florid-faced, heavily-built man, his step heavy on the puncheon floor. Facing the door, he stopped with sudden decision.

"Orderly," he called, "have the sergeant of the guard bring the messenger here at once. Search him for weapons first."

He turned toward me.

"I do not trust the villain, but I'll hear his tale. I may need you, Mr. Hayward; remain there in the back room until I call."

I could see no door.

"Where, sir?"

"In the den, beyond: the robe hides the entrance. If I need you I will call. The dog is coming now."

The interior of this room which I now entered for the first time was a revelation to me. It was fitted up as a lounging room, a den; yet bearing more resemblance to the tepee of a savage, than any abode of civilization. The trappings of war, the trophies of the chase, were everywhere in evidence. I saw all this with a single glance as I shut the door, yet almost with the instant, my entire attention was riveted upon an occupant, and I stood motionless, scarcely crediting my own eyes, as I stared across the table at the couch against the farther wall. It was in shadow, underneath the window, draped by a yellow blanket, and in one cushioned corner sat a girl, her dark head bent low over an open book. So intent was she upon the pages that she had not heard my entrance, or else remained indifferent, thinking me no stranger to the apartment.

She was young, scarcely out of her girlhood from the clear profile of her cheek, olive-tinted in the shadow, with a profusion of hair black as night, and a figure slender, but not tall. I moved rattling the latch to attract attention to my presence, yet the witch never glanced up, turning a page of her book lazily.

"Your pardon," I ventured, and cap in hand, advanced to the table nearer her.

She came to her feet in an instant, the book sliding to the floor, the long, black lashes no longer shadowing the dark eyes gazing toward me in sudden interest. She was small, swift of movement as a forest hare, yet for the instant I saw only her face, and the unfathomable depths of those eyes.

They were full of bewilderment, surprise, laughter. As though some mysterious message had passed between us, I knew she was glad I had come. "Why, monsieur," she exclaimed, hesitating slightly over the words, "I am startled! You should feel my heart beat—so fast. I thought it the general, yes—who else? But I never saw you before: you—you are an officer of the Americans!"

"Yes, I belong to this garrison. But the surprise of finding you here was mine also. I was not told the room was occupied—and you are French?"

"You not know me, monsieur?" her eyes drooping, then uplifting again. "An' you an officer of the Americans?"

"No: I have been absent hunting. I only returned an hour ago."

"Een the woods? Way out beyond? An' you saw no Indian, no French courier des bois?"

"Not one; only a white renegade"



"Then Make Your Report, Sir."

I brought in with me bearing a message."

"From the tribes, monsieur? From Detroit?"

"From the tribes, yes," I answered, surprised at her eagerness, yet seeing no harm in a frank reply, "but they were in council at Sandusky."

"Sandusky!" the word seemed to cling to her red lips. "He—he was a Frenchman then?"

"Who? The messenger? Not he. We can understand the relationship between the Canadian French and the savages. They have always been friends, but this cur is of another breed—warring against his own people."

She leaned forward, the laughter all gone from her eyes.

"Who—who was he, monsieur?"

I hesitated, wondering at her insistence, her eagerness. She leaned forward almost touching me with her fingers.

"Please, monsieur: you can tell me." "A white dog named Girty; we know him well."

"Simon Girty!" her hands clasped, her lips unconsciously repeating the name. "And from Sandusky! You say he brought message from the tribes? Mon Dieu! 'Tis strange they should choose him. He said so, monsieur?"

"He claimed to represent the tribes, but his message was from Hamilton." "An' he is there—at Sandusky—this Monsieur Hamilton?"

"He was there—yes: at least so Girty reports; but I know nothing as to where he may be now—back in Detroit likely, plotting new mischief."

My indignant speech had slight effect on her, for she laughed as I ended.

"Eet was done most well—so fine I laff, monsieur. But why you say that to me? Because I am here? In this house of the American general?"

"Bah! we are together: we are alone. My people are yonder in the woods: I serve not these long faces who sing psalms. Tell me, monsieur," she touched my hands, her pleading eyes looking up into mine, "why is eet you are here? I can be trusted."

I stared down into her eager face, almost believing I must be dreaming, yet conscious enough of her deep earnestness. What was it she thought or imagined? Could she mistake me for another? be deceived as to my identity? The thought seemed impossible, almost ridiculous. How should it be, when I stood before her in uniform, and had already declared myself an officer of the garrison? The eyes gazing up at me seemed misty, as though they held unshed tears.

"Please, monsieur," she urged anxiously. "I am but a girl—a girl of the north—yet I can be trusted. Tell me quick, so I can help."

"But I do not understand, mademoiselle, I have told you who I am. Why should you speak like this?"

"Because I know you," she insisted. "Because I have seen you before."

"Know me!" I smiled, indulgent of her whim, convinced now that I dealt with a mind diseased. "That is hardly possible."

"But I do, Monsieur Hayward, I do. Have you no memory of me? Of my face? Why are you so afraid to have faith?"

She had spoken my name, and I gazed at her in wide-eyed astonishment. Surely we had never met; yet how could she know?

"Am I not right?"

"Yes, but I have no memory of seeing you before, and you are not one to be easily forgotten. Tell me who you are?"

The dimples exhibited themselves in either cheek, yet she faced me without a movement.

"Eet is not right you should forget, monsieur; eet is no compliment. Yet I will answer; I am not afraid, and then you must remember. I am Rene D'Auvray."

The name meant nothing, told nothing.

"Rene D'Auvray?" I repeated dumbly, striving to make the sound familiar. "Oul, monsieur: now—"

She sprang back beyond the table, one finger at her lips. The door opened at my back.

"Now, Hayward," said Harmar's voice brusquely. "I've done with that scoundrel, and would speak again with you."

My eyes clung for just an instant to those of the girl, shrinking back into the shadows. Then I turned and went out, my mind full of bewilderment.

(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

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Ar. Chester.....7:00a-4:30p

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Lv. Richburg.....10:20a-7:37p

Lv. Bascomville.....10:31a-7:53p

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